



Source: Nicholas Blanford, 'Lebanon at odds over Hariri bill', *The Times*, AFP, AP in *The Australian online*, 15/11/06.

Tags: war, discomfort, countryside, corporeality, seasons, nostalgia

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'Very nervous, very, very nervous,' he muttered—white rabbit like. Not very late like the fictive rabbit, but nervous about being late. A modern affliction, an over-thinking about the dread about the action, the action not done, not complete, not perfect, not safe. Late for what?—traditional bunny pursuits like the celebration of Easter, the rapid copulation procreation pressures, the expectations of furry cuteness and innocence and mild naughtiness? But how piffling, how facile! he thought as he padded his way along the dusty road. Soft clouds rose under his footfall and hung in the dry still air, so that if another traveller were to come along behind, his path would be signposted by the string of slowly dispersing puffs.

Nothing stirred in the scrub lining the road, the dust lay thick and suffocating on the drab vegetation, the impenetrable shadows underneath were an ominous refrain on the precarious situation. No succour there, no relief or sweet oblivion. The bright, burning sky, polished and still, sounded as a drum skin when skirmishes broke out along the river beyond. At each volley he ducked his head, instinctively, and quickened his pace. It was more than ridiculous, taking such a dangerous trip by day! The incongruity of sunny byways and war no longer impressed itself on him—the world is topsy-turvy and only the adaptable survive. The focused ones managed, the resilient, the spontaneous, the wiry, flexible types. But those who dwell on what has been—the salad days, as it were—those who lived in hope of liberation, with dreams of sugar plums and time unshadowed by the threat of imminent death—these compatriots were long gone.

Each footfall drove him forward, nerves quickened his heart and the adrenaline coursed in his belly as around the corner he trotted, knowing what lay beyond. At the crest of a small rise it was all revealed before him—the pewter river flashing and smoldering in the sun; the valley scarred deeply, cruelly; gashes exposing the torn and bleeding earth. Charred remains were heaped here and there, punctuating the skeletal stands of once proud eucalypt and turpentine and boxwood. Threads of an uncanny, becalmed mist wove in and around the blackened trees, frozen like a ribbon in motion. All was alien, the once familiar terrain unmasked as at autopsy. He paused momentarily to catch his breath. He tilted his head this way and that, to catch the dappled patterns of dullness and shine, surface and depth. An indulgent, momentary reflection. His laboured breath hammered in his ears, his throat, his chest, and slowly the loyal little string of clouds created by his footfall dispersed into the hard air behind him. Quietly.

He had paused too long, and as his breathing slowed he felt the tiredness. The leaden fatigue, the deep, deep weariness. His will drained from him and lay purplish on the ground. With a shock of knowing, he stood and watched it seep into the unwilling dust—even the very

ground was unreceptive these days! There he was—his character, his vim, his mettle slowly moving across the dusty surface, at each instant losing its cohesion. Very, very nervous now—they had all been trained to cope with such an emergency but his foggy consciousness could no more recall the procedure than his flaccid body could fly! An evening breeze swept up from the valley—the earth spun faster and the day was quickly elided by the gathering dusk. Shadows lengthened as he watched. His will was gone now, only a stain was left—gathered up by the sky and thrown over the scene like a coverlet of a million shades of purple, from the palest mauves, lavender and violet to amethyst, heliotrope, magenta and mulberry wine. A sigh of purple—finite and eternal, ephemeral and enduring. He sank towards the ground, calling to be taken, knowing all was lost. His will had crossed over, been absorbed into the night sky, into the greater purplish consciousness. Without his will there was no way to reach the valley. He cursed his weary body and its fall to temptation to stop, look, remember. Anyone knew that to pause and reflect was certain death—the only other certainty was movement: to keep going, evading and dodging.

Prostrate now, happy to find the cool earth, he dragged himself under the nearest bushes. Here the darkness was so complete, his other senses rallied and his hidey hole came alive with the voices of his friends and family, with stories long forgotten and anecdotes powerful with innuendo and symbolism. Tones soothing, inspiring, comforting and eternal washed around him, rocking him as a lullaby. He felt the touch of his mother, his offspring, his childhood friends; of all the seasons and the seasons in between; all around in the deep felt darkness of this hiding place. His face in the dusty earth drew forth smells—a whiff was enough to transport him to fresh spring mornings where the crisp scents flew here and there on a capricious breeze, or to a still winter night where smell was directional and unambiguous—earth, blood, fear. And in his ears the little sounds were wrought large and bright: his feebly scratching feet, the surprisingly steady beat of his heart, the rasp of his breath. This is what he clung to, the in and the out...And it began to fill his consciousness, stronger, deeper, more resilient than he could have expected. It lifted him up then, away from the dusty hidey hole and up and over, up and up and over and over again. It was volume, it was peace—it was the grandest thing in heaven and earth. Its beauty was The Wonderment.

Unbidden and unexpected, a small tear formed in the corner of his eye, then another and another—hot, full, salty, they welled. He turned his head and they fell—plah, plah, plah—into the dust. He was reborn.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Kate Richards.*